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RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 4987
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SUBJECT: ANC DEFENDS EMBATTLED HEALTH MINISTER

REF: PRETORIA 2957

11. (U) The National Assembly on 18 October adopted a motion of full confidence in embattled Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, reversing the original motion brought

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forth by the Democratic Alliance (DA) which called for a special committee to probe her fitness to hold public office.

Sandra Botha, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, introduced the motion, citing a litany of failures on the part of the Minister and her Department saying "the yardsticks against which to measure performance...are life expectancy, infant mortality, the maternal death rate, and the incidence of incurable diseases."

12. (U) The DA's request was sparked by recent media reports alleging Tshabalala-Msimang's alcoholism, kleptomania, and incompetence (reftel). The ANC has admitted it knew about the 1970s theft charge, but has not spoken about other allegations. Tshabalala-Msimang spoke to reporters on 16 October from a Soweto Hospital (while hand delivering bassinets after an expose showed newborn babies sleeping in cardboard boxes) saying she is waiting for the right moment to speak to the media about the allegations surrounding her.

13. (U) The ANC-led Parliament used its 74 percent parliamentary majority to reword the resolution rejecting the DA's request and instead expressed its full confidence in the Health Minister. When put to a vote, there were 176 votes for and 55 against, with two abstentions. According to press reports, ANC chairman of Parliament's Health Committee James Ngculu called the DA's motion irrelevant and unconstitutional because the Constitution allows anyone to become an elected representative five years after being convicted of a crime. He also made some disparaging comments about the DA, calling the motion "an onslaught of revolutionary forces," and asking ANC MPs how they could allow themselves to be savaged by "DA hyenas who are the leaders of the right wing in South Africa." An unnamed ANC MP told the press that Tshabalala-Msimang is a very important person with strong struggle credentials and that "the party will not turn against her now; she will be protected at all costs."

14. (U) The DA's motion comes on the heels of UNICEF's declaration that South Africa is in danger of losing its battle against HIV/AIDS, with almost 1,100 South Africans dying every day from the disease. On 12 October, Ann Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, publicly said, "South Africa is neglecting most of the 100,000 children born every year with HIV/AIDS and half of them are likely to die before the age of two." She also called on the government and community leaders to end what she called a state of denial

and to recognize the magnitude of the problem. On 17 October, UNICEF's South Africa representative, Macharia Kamau, also stated that South Africa is one of only nine countries in the world where infant mortality is rising -- from 60 deaths per 1,000 births in 1990, to 95 deaths today. The main reason is HIV/AIDS, as new infections and death rates are outpacing the number of those being treated, according to Kamau. If present trends continue, Kamau said, there could be five million orphans in South Africa by 2015.

15. (SBU) The ANC's weekly newsletter, ANC Today (19-25 October 2007), questioned whether Veneman ever made such comments, whom she met with and whether they were black or white, and what her true purpose was in visiting the country. The column said, "We do not expect UNICEF to fall into the trap to elevate its profile, presumably to raise funds, by...joining a counter-productive propaganda bandwagon." It also complained that UNICEF's comments "created space for some in our media to repeat the shameless and tired lies about our President and Minister of Health." Mbeki also expressed overall disappointment in UNICEF, saying "the noble cause (of fighting HIV/AIDS) will not be served by four-day visits to our country by "senior UN officials," (quotes in original) and their involvement in dishonest propaganda campaigns."

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